

Guide to Establishing an Online Teaching Program



Considerations and
Recommendations for
Colleges and Faculty

Guide to Establishing an Online Teaching Program

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Community Colleges (PT@CC)**

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AUGUST 2013



More than a decade ago, the APA Task Force on Distance Education and Training in Professional Psychology (2002) cited several areas of concern in distance education in general, including:

- (a) building a sufficient information technology (IT) infrastructure that includes adequate computer systems and communication access for all students and faculty;
- (b) providing training and support for faculty and students to use the system comfortably and effectively, including maintaining a responsive help desk to answer questions and solve problems quickly; and
- (c) ascertaining there is a clearly articulated strategic plan congruent with the institution's mission and values and supported by all levels of administration and faculty.

As a response to how an institution might address concerns cited by the task force and as a resource for faculty members considering online teaching, the American Psychological Association (APA) Committee of Psychology Teachers at Community Colleges (PT@CC) has created the *Guide to Establishing an Online Teaching Program*.

It is divided into three sections: **Faculty Preparation for Online Teaching**, **College Support for Online Teaching**, and **Online Student Support Services**.



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During the fall 2010 semester,

6.1 million

POSTSECONDARY STUDENTS were enrolled in at least one online class
(Allen & Seaman, 2011).

Online classes have become a prominent part of the education landscape, and many professors who previously believed they would never teach online are being asked to offer Web enhancements to their face-to-face classes or teach a class entirely online. And, while interest in online classes from both students and college administrators has led to an increase in the number of online classes, information for faculty members being asked to offer these classes is sparse, consisting primarily of technology help and advice. Little is available to help faculty members navigate the resources, compensation structures, and pedagogical concerns unique to the virtual classroom.

It is our hope that this guide will help fill that gap and facilitate the application of the science of teaching and learning to online psychology classes.

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Faculty Preparation for Online Teaching

Faculty members who teach primarily face-to-face (F2F) classes may find the world of online teaching and learning intimidating, unattractive, or cumbersome. Some may find online teaching simply does not fit their teaching style. Others may find the prospect of teaching online excites them in its possibility of reaching students unable to take F2F classes for various reasons. Whatever the case, knowing about the online teaching environment prior to committing yourself to it is advisable.

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Take an online class

Finley, Brothen, and Froman (2005), noting the importance of faculty members' knowing the strengths and weaknesses of the online format in order to make an informed decision about teaching an online class, recommended an instructor first take an online class. Taking an online class serves dual purposes: It allows you as a potential online instructor to experience the class from the student's perspective, and it exposes you to the format and structure of the online class environment. Some colleges and universities offer training for potential online instructors; some even deliver that training online.



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Assess your technology knowledge and know where to get support

Teaching online does not require you to be a technology genius; however, you will need to know the technology geniuses on your campus. Familiarize yourself with the technology resources and people at your institution. Identify and create relationships with instructors who have been teaching online and using the learning management system (LMS) your college supports. Those who have been using a particular system often have learned the idiosyncrasies of the system and can give you time-saving tips and tricks when you are setting up your class. In addition to the LMS experts, the IT and/or center for teaching and learning staffs, a great resource on campus is your campus library. Often, digital resources are available through your library, and librarians can help you locate and make them available to your students, sometimes even specifically for your class. The library may also be able to purchase the rights to stream videos pertinent to your subject so your online students can access them.



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Understand the time commitment and recognize advantages

Teaching an online class requires much more time than teaching an F2F class. When considering teaching online, many faculty members report a daunting time commitment (Rockwell, Schauer, Fritz, & Marx, 1999). In a study conducted by Zuckweiler, Schniederjans, and Ball (2004), the researchers collected and analyzed data on the time it took to perform various tasks associated with teaching an F2F class versus the time spent on those tasks when teaching the same class online. Zuckweiler et al. (2004) found it took 39.9% more time to teach the class online. However, with practice, the amount of time needed to teach online decreased as faculty members became more efficient (Zuckweiler et al., 2004). A study conducted by the National Education Association (2000) showed that 53% of faculty teaching a distance-learning (online) class spent more time preparing and delivering that class than they did a traditional one, and 22% spent less time. The study also found that among those who had taught their online class eight or more times, 48% spent more time on the online class than on a traditional one, and 21% spent less time on the online class.



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Understand the time commitment and recognize advantages (continued)

While there seems to be general agreement that online teaching is more time consuming than F2F teaching (Zuckweiler et al., 2004; Finley et al., 2005, National Education Association, 2000; American Federation of Teachers, 2000), online teaching may provide advantages. For example, online teaching may free a faculty member to set his or her own schedule in terms of commuting to campus. Online teaching reduces an institution's carbon footprint in that there is less paper and less commuting to campus by students. Paper-free communication may also save time in that when something is posted online for a class, it is available immediately to all the online students. Determining how the time commitment and advantages affect you is part of the decision-making process.



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Learn to maintain academic integrity

Maintaining academic integrity in class is a concern for both F2F and online classes. Research suggests the rate of academic misconduct in online classes is about the same as in F2F classes despite the perception that online classes present more opportunities for misconduct because there is less instructor supervision (Grijalva, Nowell, & Kerkvliet, 2006; Hart & Morgan, 2010; Stephens, Young, & Calabrese, 2007). Research by Mastin, Peszka, and Lilly (2009) suggests that students are more likely to engage in academic misconduct late in the semester than early in the semester. Other researchers suggest that panic may account for some of the late-semester cheating (Grijalva et al., 2006).

Research findings also offer suggestions for decreasing the likelihood of academic misconduct in online classes. Careful formulation of syllabi to minimize the likelihood of late-semester panic might lessen end-of-semester cheating. Other strategies demonstrated to reduce academic misconduct are implementing an online academic integrity module (Belter & du Pre, 2009) and applying a clearly articulated student honor code (Kitahara & Westfall, 2007).

When it comes to tests, some colleges require proctoring, while others do not. If your college has testing centers with convenient hours for students



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to take tests in a proctored setting (whether paper-and-pencil or online (though with restrictions, if desired, on the use of books and notes)), this may be one way to proceed. However, this way limits the accessibility of your class to students who live locally. Another option is using webcams. Webcams using software such as Tegrity™ or Software Secure™ allow for virtual proctoring. Students take their tests at home on their computers. They do their work just as they would normally, but first, they turn on the webcam, which records audio/video, so the professor can see they are not getting help from others. Typically, students are required to display a photo ID to verify their identity. Recordings can be erased after the grade-challenge period is over. Webcams are standard equipment with today's laptops and tablet computers or can be purchased for about \$20.

Testing is an area in which the online environment actually offers some unique solutions to mitigate concerns about academic misconduct. For example, most learning management systems facilitate the presentation of exam items in random order and/or the presentation of a random subset of the total number of questions that have been uploaded to the system. This way, no two students will likely see the same exam. Time limits can also be put on the exam so students have limited time to complete it. And, many LMS allow papers to be checked against other submitted papers for plagiarism.



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- ☐ Offer compensation
- ☐ Hire instructional designers
- ☐ Provide other IT support
- ☐ Reduce class size

College Support for Online Teaching

Colleges that offer online classes need to support the teaching of those classes. In 2009, the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions published *Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education (Online Learning)*, which mandated this support in one of its criteria for the evaluation of distance education: “Faculty responsible for delivering the online curricula and evaluating the students’ success in achieving the online learning goals are appropriately qualified and *effectively supported*” (emphasis added; Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions, 2009, p. 4). To that end, colleges need to ensure appropriate support for qualified faculty is in place.



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Provide training

One of the ways colleges can support their faculty members who teach online is to offer them training in best practices. Several programs are available nationally in the U.S. that train faculty members in how to set up high-quality online courses. Groups such as Quality Matters™, the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium (CTDLC), and the Sloan Consortium® provide training and rubrics faculty members can use as they work on their own classes.



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Offer compensation for course development

As mentioned earlier, teaching an online class can be time consuming. In addition, developing an online class can be daunting. Learning and becoming proficient using an LMS takes time, and uploading materials to the online environment is also time-consuming. Once you learn how to use the LMS, you need to learn how to teach students through it. Many institutions offer compensation to faculty members who develop and teach an online class for the first time. This compensation may be in the form of release/reassigned time or a financial stipend.

Because many faculty members see the time required to develop a new class as a barrier to developing online classes, it is in the college's best interest to compensate faculty members who want to teach an online class for the first time. Faculty members need to be aware, however, that if they are being financially compensated for developing an online class, the class and materials for it will likely be the property of the college. The Virtual College of Texas, a service of the Texas Association of Community Colleges, publishes a list of the various compensation structures of participating colleges on its website: https://www.vct.org/PDFdocs/Online_Course_Development_Compensation_2011.pdf.



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Provide other IT support



Reduce class size



Hire instructional designers

Pairing excellent professors with excellent resources is essential. Oblinger and Hawkins (2006) suggest it is unrealistic to expect someone to have the teaching expertise and technological skills to put everything together for an online class. They argue that a better use of limited institutional dollars is to pair a faculty member with an instructional designer who can help the faculty member develop an online course (Oblinger & Hawkins, 2006). The instructional designer can help with IT issues, LMS issues, copyright and intellectual property, and outside-link maintenance (making sure the links to outside material are working) (Oblinger & Hawkins, 2006). This team approach allows the instructor to be the subject matter expert—answering student questions and providing students with the learning resources they need to be successful—and someone else who is more focused on the technology and often familiar with best practices in online education to work on the technical part of the interface between the students and the institution. Oblinger and Hawkins (2006) also argue that hiring instructional designers can help make all the online classes offered at an institution have a similar look and feel rather than a patchwork of different-looking online courses, making the experience somewhat predictable and therefore less stressful for the student.



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Provide other IT support

To allow the instructor to take care of the subject matter rather than spend a lot of time troubleshooting the technology, the college should provide IT training on the use of the LMS chosen by the college. The instructor should also have someone on campus available for questions on using the system. A users group consisting of others who use the LMS and teach online could also be helpful for instructors to help each other and share what has worked well.



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Reduce class size

One of the most recommended ways to cope with the additional time required for teaching online classes is to reduce the class size. Zuckweiler et al. (2004) recommend adjusting class size using the following formula that takes into account the amount of time spent teaching online classes compared to the amount of time spent teaching traditional classes:

$$\left(\frac{\text{Total time for online class}}{\text{Total time for traditional class}} \right) \times 100 = \text{Adjustment index}$$

$$\text{Traditional class size} / \text{Adjustment index} = \text{Online class size}$$

The Zuckweiler et al. (2004) findings suggest that an online class, on average, takes 39.9% more time to teach, and, thus, the class size should be 39.9% smaller than that of its traditional counterpart. Other researchers suggest that online classes take at least one-third more time to teach, and, thus, the class size should be reduced by one-third the size of its traditional counterpart (Finley et al., 2005).



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- ☐ Offer writing assistance
- ☐ Provide technology assistance
- ☐ Offer opportunities

Online Student Support Services

Just as faculty members require support for their online classes, students also need support. Colleges that offer online classes, particularly to students who will never visit the physical campus, need to give their online students as many of the same student-support options available to F2F students as possible. In addition, the instructor needs to post information about the student support in a prominent location so students can easily access it. One way to ensure students are aware of the availability of student support is to make a related assignment due during the first week of class. In the assignment, the student would need to answer questions about the available student-support services on your campus. Regional accrediting bodies (Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions, 2009) may also evaluate student and academic support services for online students.



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Help determine if online class is right



Offer writing assistance



Provide technology assistance



Offer opportunities



Help students determine if an online class is the right choice

Online classes are not for everyone, so communicating your expectations of students at the beginning of the online course is a good idea. In fact, many colleges offer students some sort of assessment tool so they can evaluate their readiness to take a class online. (An example from Glendale Community College, AZ, can be found at <http://www.gccaz.edu/eCourses/Readiness.cfm>.) Completing such an assessment either before enrolling in the online class or during the first week of an online class is advisable. In addition, the students will have to meet certain technology requirements. Giving the students information up front about those expectations, including how often they will need Internet access, what software and hardware are required, and the amount of time they can expect to spend, is appropriate as students may enter the virtual classroom with unrealistic expectations. Colleges might also help students by providing them with information they need to make an informed decision prior to enrollment.



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Help determine if online class is right



Offer writing assistance



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Offer writing assistance

Help with writing is often offered on college campuses free or at little cost to traditional students. Online students may also need writing support. Because of the technology available, colleges that offer writing assistance to F2F students can also offer it to online students. Students can submit assignments for review and receive feedback electronically. In as many ways as possible, online students need to have access to services such as writing assistance and tutoring at the same level as their traditional student colleagues.



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Offer writing assistance



Provide technology assistance



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Provide technology assistance

Students will invariably run into technological problems from time to time. Institutions offering online classes should support online students with a local person/office they can contact for technology issues. This support should also be familiar with the LMS the college uses, available by phone most of the work day, and able to help troubleshoot most issues. Technological support after hours is extremely helpful, as many online students complete course-work outside normal business hours; however 24-hour assistance from the college is often not feasible. Most LMS companies provide a toll-free number for technological help 24 hours per day. The technological assistance offered by most of those companies, while often available toll-free, will be specific to system, not college-specific, issues.

If this kind of support is not provided, students will most likely contact their instructor with technology issues, which is not a good use of the instructor's time and may be outside the instructor's area of expertise.



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Offer opportunities



Offer opportunities for campus life

Traditional colleges typically offer some form of student life on campus, including a student union building where students can meet, have lunch, or hang out. Having something similar available for online students may prove to be a challenge for traditional colleges, but colleges that are primarily online can provide some guidance. Connection to the college can be achieved technologically through sources such as Google +, Facebook, and Twitter, which most colleges are already using. However, some schools are designing and implementing college-specific tools to foster student-to-student interaction. Rio Salado College, an online community college in Tempe, AZ, has launched what it calls the Rio Lounge, which is an online student union where students can learn about the college or hang out virtually. A preliminary data analysis has shown that use of the Rio Lounge is correlated with degree completion among students who declared the intention to complete a degree (Brock, 2013). Having students feel connected to the college may improve student retention, so creating opportunities such as a virtual student union for students to feel they are a part of what is happening at the college can be worth the effort.



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Offer writing
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Offer opportunities for campus life (continued)

Some colleges are posting short videos of faculty and staff online to introduce students to those with whom they may have electronic contact. (For an example, see the eLearning webpage at Tacoma Community College at <http://www.tacomacc.edu/areasofstudy/learningoptions/elearning>.)

This personal connection may help students feel more comfortable requesting information or help.



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Online Course Design Resources

Rubrics for Online Instruction

<http://www.csuchico.edu/roi>

<http://www.qmprogram.org/rubric>

Instructional Design Tools for Online Learning

(works with the above rubric)

<http://www.csuchico.edu/tlp/resources/rubric/instructionalDesignTips.pdf>

Instructional Design for Mediated Education

<http://id.ome.ksu.edu>

MERLOT: Multimedia Education Resource for Learning and Online Teaching

<http://www.merlot.org/merlot/index.htm>

The Sloan Consortium: Individuals, Institutions, and Organizations Committed to Quality Online Education

<http://sloanconsortium.org/conference/2013/et4online/about>



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Multimedia Resources for Use in Online Classes

YouTube—Education

<http://www.youtube.com/education>

Kahn Academy

<https://www.khanacademy.org>

Academic Earth

<http://www.academicearth.org>

TED Talks

<http://www.ted.com>

OER Commons—Open Educational Resources

<http://www.oercommons.org>

Connexions (view and share educational materials)

<http://cnx.org>

Open Courseware Consortium (including a link to the Community College Open Educational Resources)

<http://www.ocwconsortium.org>

MIT Open Courseware

<http://ocw.mit.edu/index.htm>



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Other Resources

Free articles and reports on effective teaching and learning
in higher education:

<http://www.facultyfocus.com>

List of books about teaching and technology:

[http://elearningatpscc.weebly.com/
books-about-teaching-and-technology.html](http://elearningatpscc.weebly.com/books-about-teaching-and-technology.html)

21st Century Tools

<http://web20-21stcentury-tools.wikispaces.com>

Cool Tools for School

<http://cooltoolsforschools.wikispaces.com>

Free online screen capture program:

<http://www.screencast-o-matic.com>

(Tips for the use of Screencast-O-Matic can be found on the website for
The Ohio State University: [http://ocio.osu.edu/elearning/toolbox/brief/
screencast-o-matic/7-things-you-should-know-about-screencast-o-matic](http://ocio.osu.edu/elearning/toolbox/brief/screencast-o-matic/7-things-you-should-know-about-screencast-o-matic))

100 Essential Tools for Teachers

<http://www.onlinedegree.net/100-essential-2-0-tools-for-teachers>

Innovative Learning (more tools)

<http://www.innovativelearning.com>

